

# Work and class studies in the post-socialist world

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## Work and class studies in the post-socialist world.

### Abstract

This article reviews the scholarly treatment of the working class in studies of post-socialist states in Central and Eastern Europe. It traces the way the patent falsehood in the Marxian discourse of the working-class as the dominant class under socialism led to reluctance to develop a meaningful working-class studies in the post-socialist academy. Moreover in their concern with liberal democratization, an elusive civil society, and the role of the market, researchers working on the East are even more prone to demonizing the ‘losers’ of transition – industrial workers and the urban poor – than in the West. Nonetheless important scholarly contributions have been made in sociology on the way workers coped with massive economic and social dislocation in the 1990s and after. Similarly in research on social networks, memory studies and personhood, the informal economy, deindustrialization, and the ‘domestication’ of neoliberalism, shows that empirically-grounded work that takes the working-classes of Eastern Europe as its subject can make important contributions to wider debates in social science.

### Context

Class is everywhere you look in the post-socialist world. The media are awash with stories about aspirational yet ‘normal’ ‘European’ lifestyles and the desirability of gated communities (Blinnikov et al. 2006; Polanska 2010). There is the endless discussion of ‘communist-era’ mentalities and outmoded concepts such as social justice and cohesion. Popular culture is rife with trashy stereotypes of ‘low-lives’ and track-suit-clad petty criminals that serve as thinly veiled fantasies about the dangerous lumpenization of the post-socialist working classes (Stenning 2005; Walker 2014). Given the persistence of semi-authoritarian governments in the former Soviet Union and

resurgent populist politics in Eastern Europe, social protests are analysed for what they reveal about the growth of the middle class. In scholarship too there is selective attention and selective invisibility (Ost 2009). In Russia, one of the least democratic and largest of the post-socialist states, the liberal English-speaking intellectual elites bemoan what they see as the political compliance of 'ordinary people' to the government's revanchist, chauvinistic and authoritarian agenda. Pensioners, rural dwellers, but even more so the blue-collar workers of the industrial 'hinterlands' are seen as a dangerous class of political conservatives (Zubarevich 2009, 2011), or worse, in Central East Europe they are seen as easy prey to populist neo-nationalist movements (Kalb 2011: 7). Easily written off in this way, the road to modernization and democratization is reserved for the 'creative class' (Kustarev 2013), a construction that belies the continuing widespread reality of low-tech manufacturing and resource extraction which underpins many of the regions' economies (Maslova 2009). Indeed, many of these states have become sought-after sites of manufacturing because of the new consumer markets they offer to transnational corporations. It is strange that we write off the study of workers at the very moment they may serve as a revealing crunch point at the meeting of unbridled neoliberal capital and disembedded labour between global north and south. Just as once the working-class were the 'vanguard' of revolution and progress, now the 'creative class' (Kustarev 2013) are a talismanic 'locomotive of modernisation' and social transformation of these countries into 'normal' polities. 'Middle class' comes to stand for class studies more generally, but with little or no acknowledgment that in CEE this group still remains a 'spirit seeking a social body.' (Smolar 1996). Similarly, when it comes to work and organizations, scholarship often focuses on the genuine success of the creative and new media industries, while the bread and butter of the socialist era – blue-collar work or the factory, is rarely the object of research, except as a form of 'ruin-gazing' (High 2013), or as part of the study of urban renewal and deindustrialization (Trubina 2013).

## The hangover of communist-era sociology

The lack of interest in studying the realities of working-class life after socialism and the distaste for a home-grown working-class studies is easy to understand: for years not only politicians and ordinary people, but scholars too had to pay more than lip service to a vulgar Marxian class-based sociology that was schizoid in the extreme: workers were the most progressive class, the builders of communism, but since communism was supposed to be imminent, the social fact of class divisions under communism and the reality of a ruthlessly exploited working-class had to be denied (Belen’kii 2005: 128; Filippov 2013). Communist regimes continually invoked class imagery as one of many tactics of legitimization. A superficial and increasingly meaningless class lexicon was embedded in society — ‘in legal texts, the media, at the workplace, and of course in academia, too’ (Fabo 2015: 589). Despite this, ‘sociology’ was allergic to scientific inquiry into class issues. Regimes were afraid the results would show high inequality and that the actually existing life of the working class was just as miserable under socialism as capitalism. Indeed, some take the view that the sociology of class and inequality was largely impossible to practice – as a ‘bourgeois pseudoscience’, replaced by Marxism-Leninism (ibid). Filippov (2013), writing about the late USSR, argues that at the same time as Soviet sociology dismissed Western empirical research on workers as contributing to capitalism’s continued exploitation, Soviet sociology was a *policing* science par excellence – obsessively focussed on the ‘concrete’ empirical underpinning of the state’s legitimacy by means of the accumulation of mass survey data.

The history of sociology under communist has important implications for present – Filippov argues that Russian sociology is still Soviet, in the sense that it conceptualises itself as needing to resist ideological control in the name of science. However, ironically, one can argue that this leads in the present to an overly narrow, highly positivistic and uncritical positioning. The vast majority of

social science remains arms-length, survey-based, ‘conservative and functionalist’ (Fabo 2015: 591). Class analysis is dominated by stratification and employment-based approaches adopted from Goldthorpe, and British sociology of a particular era more generally. In some cases there is good reason for this – for example in linking rapid social and political change to the destruction of a relatively homogenous industrial working-class (e.g. Lazić and Svejić 2010). However, this means that the use of qualitative methods to reach marginalised groups is the exception – with obvious implications for work on class.

At the same time, there has been an ‘anti-class’ turn, where critical analyses of new property relations, systemic transformation and power structures in the post-socialist world is lacking (Ost and Gagyí 2015; Ost 2015). Now, freed of ideological constraints, native scholarship often resembles the revenge of the repressed, producing an avalanche of work on the ‘creative’ middle classes and ‘achievement ideology’ often based on the uncritical acceptance of the idea of successful imposition from above of a neoliberal order. This gives the myth of postsocialist classlessness a relentlessly aggressive inflection in such contexts. Self-censorship is active among scholars when they accept the priority of civil society building over maintaining ‘old fashioned’ social protection (Fabo 2015: 590). The cult of the middle class masks the exacerbation of conflict and the polarization between capital and labour in post-socialist states. Now that class differences are no longer disguised by ideology they are ‘practically excluded from Russian sociology’ (Belenkii 2005: 128). More critical scholars bemoan their colleagues’ use of essentializing and depersonalised categories like the passive and reactionary ‘folk’ which feature prominently in mainstream sociology (Pokrovskii 2005, Morris 2016). At best, as in some contexts in the West, influential scholars argue that class analysis is no longer relevant to ‘reflexive modernity’ (Crompton 2008, Hass 2012).

A final symptom of the above position is the renewed interest in urban studies which reflects the displacement of class and the lack of a significant interest in working-class studies. Urban studies reproduces the uncritical logic of deindustrialisation and gentrification as 'natural'. This is despite the fact that it is hardly possible to call these post-industrial societies. The mass closures of factories in the 1990s after the collapse of communism remains the dominant image, but in the last fifteen years there has been massive foreign direct investment in plant and personnel as transnational corporations have sought intermediary spaces in the global economy with cheaper labour costs, but which host 'hardworking' and relatively well-skilled populations. I return to this point later in discussions of the relevance of working-class studies in post-socialist places for social science in general. Finally, in authoritarian states like Russia and in Central Asia, urban and social movement studies focus generally on the middle-classedness of metropolitan protests and pay much less attention to industrial disputes which tend to occur outside the metropolises but are arguably a better bellwether of democratising change (Zubarevich 2009). Here too there is an implicit assumption that mass urban protests are the exclusive domain of 'the middle class', 'the creative class', and the coded 'angry city-dwellers', despite evidence to the contrary (Bibkov 2012, Grigoryeva 2015).

#### The scholarly heritage of class-studies – communism as a laboratory in exploitation

Despite the 'middle-classification' of Eastern Europe as following similar, if more extreme lines as in W. Europe (Edwards *et al.* 2012), there have always been good reasons for sociologists and anthropologists to study the lived experience of the working classes. In the Soviet period scholarship about workers related mainly to studies of political engagement, resistance and (false) consciousness (e.g. Holubenko 1975). In the West scholars were keen to measure the political responses to increased exploitation and saw the working-class as a barometer of possible social

discontent. Much of this work was done in historical studies rather than sociology, but the best work emerged from cross-fertilisation of these two disciplines – a fact that should be remembered for any scholars seeking a holistic treatment of class in the present. In the later socialist period as western scholars gained at least limited access, political historiographical research, anthropology, sociology and area studies all provided important insights into the extremely harsh life and economic burden the working-classes suffered, but due to the closed nature of the countries there was little empirically-based social science carried out. Haraszti's work on Hungary (1977) is a notable and classic 'native' sociological description of atomizing and alienated factory life, but is written from the point of view of the anti-communist intelligentsia. Another landmark is the work on Hungary by Michael Burawoy (1992) who drew important attention to the camaraderie of working-classes, identifying a grim solidarity despite, or because of their exploitation. Burawoy also showed in a highly sensitive way that the less mediated exploitation of communism meant that workers saw through ideology and developed a kind of negative (critical) class consciousness, despite supporting the broad aims of socialism. More recently Hann (2006: 106) makes insightful links between anthropology and sociology, suggesting that this line of enquiry has implications in rethinking the relationships between alienation, identification and work more generally – in contexts where consumption cannot act as a mechanism for compensation for exploitation. This also has implications for studying the lived experience of class in the present both in post-socialist societies and the West, where notions of precarious work and lack of class mobility are pressing concerns.

By the end of the socialist period, despite some important sociological studies of the 'growing assertiveness' of workers (Triska and Gati 1981), the conclusion most came to was that due to the long history of internal (e.g. through unions as agents of the state) and external policing working-classes were politically atomized and unable to take on a significant role in post-socialist social or

political transformation. Labour historiography added much to this debate in terms of patina and detail, but generally supported the atomization and ‘exploited victims’ of the coercion line (Filtzer 1992, 1996; Kotkin 1995, Siegelbaum 1988, Siegelbaum and Suny 1994, Straus 1997). On the other hand these historians of the Stalinist period also pointed to the structural power of workers under socialism. This scholarly legacy – the paradox of ‘passivity’ versus incipient working-class power – in the post-socialist period has been explored in labour studies and sociology – notably by Crowley and Ost (2001) and Clarke et al. (1995). Historical sociology has recently also painted a more nuanced picture of the contested nature of the inner life of industrial socialism and its workers as more than the passive victims of state power (Kenney 1997, Pittaway 2012, Hornsby 2013).

An outstanding example of grounded empirical scholarship which explores the complex meanings of workers’ lifeworlds in the transition from socialism to post-socialism is the slender yet wide-ranging account of Russian factory workers dealing their disintegrating class-position and moribund workshops by Sergei Alasheev (1995a, 1995b, Alasheev and Kiblitkaia 1996), a member of Simon Clarke’s team. Alasheev’s body of work on workers, stretching to a mere 90 pages, manages to accomplish a sensitive and deeply resonant portrait of change, yet the enduring social embeddedness of workers in the (post)-socialist factory. Through their embedded personhoods as workers means that a kind of ‘love’ of work, colleagues and place endures throughout in spite of the destruction of the socialist factory and the social compact. In terms of anticipating a rebirth of empirically grounded, yet theoretically informed sociology, Alasheev’s work serves as a signpost for more recent social science on work and workers in the East. For example: how does work continue to serve as a powerfully anchoring source of identity, well-being, attachment and sense of possible autonomy? At the same time how do workers endure and cope with bearing the brunt of the loss of breadwinner status, and security associated with the socialist period? Not to mention the loss of the enterprise as the source of the social wage, massive loss of purchasing power in their



cash wages, enormous loss of status, demonization even, as explored earlier? Do workers in these states now have more in common with production-scapes in the global south? Do practical skills and a long history of ‘making do’ mean that precarity is ‘compensated’ for by the informal economy and in DIY practices à la de Certeau (Caldwell 2004: 29, Morris 2016)?

Similarly, while the factories are dismembered and these societies undergo a massive demographic shock that could be compared to a massive sociocide (a Lancet study matter-of-factly describes 10 million ‘missing’ working-age men – Stuckler *et al.* 2009), the working-class spaces of factory towns and urban settlements do not disappear. Memory and place are linked to working-class identity again, in a Certeauian manner as ‘a sort of anti-museum’ filled with absent presences (1984: 108). The spirit of class-based loyalties haunts many spaces still and reveals itself in the meagre yet vital life practices of the marginalised and humiliated, revealing class-based resourcefulness, and some mutuality. These may be less than the ‘resistance’ of débrouillardise (Reed-Danahay 1993), but are more than ‘just coping’ (Morris 2012b). Neither is ‘resilience’ wholly appropriate a term – too often it is applied as the corollary to critiques working-classes’ supposed inability to adapt. Resilience becomes a way of naturalizing and therefore excusing neoliberal governmentality (Zebrowski 2013), and shifts risks that should be dealt with at the level of the social onto the ‘adaptable’ individual (Joseph 2013). Thus another key to the relevance of class in post-socialism is the question of communities and individuals response to the incessant hailing by the model of the neoliberal self.

### The recent scholarship – three waves

Despite its difficult history, there are some reasons to be hopeful about a renewal of interest in work and class studies in the former socialist world. The previous section shows that there was always a

small, mainly Anglophone community of scholars working on the reality of factory shop floor relations, and the lived existence of class. This took place in a relatively broad and open sub-discipline where sociology, labour studies and anthropology intersect with area studies. In some cases, like that of Clarke on Russia, a formidable team of native researchers made such investigations that much more fruitful. Along with those mentioned above, Claudio Morrison (2008) and Sarah Ashwin (1998, 1999) produced definitive works on the post-communist transition of relations in Russian industry – the decay of paternalism and the endless patience of workers in the 1990s. At the same time they produced important insights into the kind of neoliberal reform imposed on these societies and how ordinary people responded and ‘coped’ with it.

More recently, in the 2000s, Elizabeth Dunn (2004), Chris Hann (2006), David Kideckel (2002, 2004, 2008) and Alison Stenning *et al.* (2010), to name a few, provided empirically rich, yet theoretically insightful and satisfying conceptions of particular forms of neo-capitalism and ‘domestications’ of neoliberalism by workers in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia/Poland, respectively. Stenning *et al.* (2010) argue for a ‘domestication’ of neoliberalism in postsocialist communities, but more often their portrait is of enforced ‘accommodation’ – as those who could formerly reproduce the working-class household are forced into portfolio employment. Similarly Kideckel (2002) stresses the ‘unmaking’ of a working class in Romania; the pace of ‘neocapitalist’ forces there lead to extreme declines in workers’ fortunes.

Now something approximating a third wave of sociologically-minded scholars studies work and class in post-socialist societies, increasingly in an intersectional manner. This is not so much a cultural, as an ethnographic turn in the scholarship on post-socialist work. In this they are joined by their native colleagues in those states themselves. Allied to a longstanding strength in Russian youth studies and taking its cue from empirically-driven sociologies of class, the research of Walker

(2009, 2014) and Salmenniemi (2012) has looked at the intersection of class, work, youth, social mobility, gender, consumption and rural-urban migration in Russia, bringing a performative and interactionist lens to analysis. From the more anthropological side, recent work by Kesküla (2014), Rotkirch *et al.* (2012), and Morris (2012a) have provided details of the actual organizational and relational processes of labour disembedding and alienation in the post-socialist period. But in addition, they have also documented the encounter of transnational capital, post-socialist workers and re-embedding processes of governmentalization more closely. Following a long and distinguished path of political history and sociology that traced workers and legitimation under socialism (discussed above), a new generation of scholars are at the forefront of a new historicism of labour and working classes under late socialism (Barta 2013), while others focus on the continuing salience of nostalgia and memory – or mnemonic resources of class - intersecting with classed identities and the meaning of work (Levinson 2007; Schwartz and Morrison 2013, Morris 2014).

Lem (2002: 287), writing on contemporary France, argues that class maintains its potency both as a subjective category and an analytical category there despite processes of deindustrialization, and 'remains indispensable to understanding the nature of change in late capitalism'. But what of post-socialist societies where social and economic transformation has occurred in little more than a generation? As alluded to earlier – some of the key questions around class arise from new forms of precarity that workers face after the loss of the social state in post-communism (Artiukh 2015, Nedbálková 2015, Mrozowski 2011). This is experientially refracted through the living memory of the socialist period – particularly in urban spaces like monotowns where generations of workers have lived, even if these places have suffered rapid deindustrialisation.

At the same time some CEE states have recently experienced new forms of neoliberal patch-work reindustrialisation, as transnational corporations relocate production to what are now low labour cost countries attached to the core. Workers in these regions are therefore a key ‘pinch point’ in the current stage of the globalisation of capital, the world-wide spread of neoliberal ideas of personhood and governmentality, and therefore a mine of sociological data on a possible future for the ‘West’: societies stripped of most pretences of social democracy, the welfare state, workplaces less mediated by pretences of industrial relations, typified by low social mobility, high inequality, and a growing informal economy and other symptoms of precarity. It is with these factors in mind that I provide a final short snapshot of some promising themes being worked on at the moment in these areas.

### Workers’ spaces

The scholarly tome on socialist-era workers and worker spaces with arguably the biggest impact, Kotkin’s *Magnetic Mountain* (1995), was a work of labour history, not sociology, but its documentary analysis of the significance of the factory town to socialism points to the continuing need to understand the worker spaces of post-socialism, so often are they bound up with identity and the fate of the working-classes in the present and future. Kotkin provides a rich portrait of the total social institution of the factory town under Stalinism – but also shows how workers’ articulation of a social contract with the state emerges in this space and time – along with social mobility, despite the coercive nature of the Soviet factory. In turn, recently scholars have focussed on the legacy of the ‘company town’ or monotown for the present workers as they struggle with economic transformation.

Alison Stenning *et al.* (2010) put the emphasis on ‘coping’ and managing by workers who are at the sharp end of market-led reform: ‘domesticating neoliberalism’ explains how Polish and Slovak worker families deal with the loss of jobs and their new status as ‘working poor’. The major contribution of this study is the satisfyingly complete account of placeness – the massive high-rise housing estates of Krakow and Bratislava that retain a working-class identity and serve as some kind of basis of survival in social networking and mutual aid in the present. Alice Mah (2012) provides a comparative analysis of different global spaces of industrial ‘ruination’ – one of the cases is a textile town in Russia. There she finds a similar functional pragmatism, as well as attachment to the past and place, even in decline. Deindustrialisation of space is connected to the lived dimensions of classed communities that continue on after the factory has become a shadow of its former self. There are a number of other recent treatments of the company town that highlight the significance of placeness and the continuity of industrial and class identities in the present across Eurasian post-socialist states (Tkach 2008, Pelkmans 2013, Kesküla 2014, Rajkovic 2015, Morris 2016).

### Memory – the past in the present

As can be seen from some of the earlier research cited, there is a tendency, even in work sensitive to the personness of workers, to focus on their victimhood – and of course there is good reason for this. Vaccaro (2006) writing on the deindustrialised Spanish Pyrenees, notes that while social memory among groups subject to loss of status and livelihood can essentialize positive aspects and fall into nostalgia – a category widely explored in post-socialism – it is equally important to avoid pervasive essentializations of the ‘lack of options for the local populations in the face of these changes. Local agency, however, manifests itself in many ways: resistance, transformation, negotiation, connivance or denial’ (372). Memory studies of class remain an important way of

highlighting the ongoing articulation of class in the present in terms of the past – in community and family memories of the meaning of dignity in work, the social wage (Schwartz 2015; Straughn 2009). For example, Smolyak (2014) examines the changing meaning of factory gleaning and 'resource theft' for DIY practices in the past and present in Russia. Always key to the maintenance of social networks, DIY linked professional identity, pride in work and particularly socialist forms of ownership. However, now, with limited access to factory resources, DIY is linked to the loss of social justice. An attention to the *longue durée* of class identity also serves to put a check on postindustrial theorising that subscribes to the proposition that the recent changes of late capitalism represent radical breaks and disjunctures. The temporal and more agency-focussed approaches reflect a wider shift towards biographical and oral history research in the region (Raleigh 2012). This seeks to use autobiographical narratives, written memories and the like to better understand the dynamic of social transformation in Eastern Europe and the biographical 'consequences' of class disembedding (e.g. Golczynska-Grondas and Potoczna 2015).

#### Actually-lived experience of class in the present – and future avenues for research

Unsurprisingly then, the most insightful work on working-class agency not only pays attention to their sense of place and memory, but on temporal continuities even as actually-lived existence of marginalised people changes: what workers 'do' and 'make' – whether they remain in formal normative factory employment or are pushed into the margins in the informal economy, subsistence farming, or white-collar service work – which may be experienced as both downward and upward mobility (Walker 2014, Morris 2016). In addition to some of the work cited earlier and while not always directly addressing the fate of post-socialist working-classes, other examples in the line of apprehending class in the present are studies on 'invisible citizens' (informal day labourers) in Lithuania (Harboe Knudsen 2014), the 'normalisation of precarity' among youth in Poland

(Mrozowicki 2011), class, gender and biopolitics in Russia (Salmenniemi and Adamson 2014), and the classedness of domestic and care work in Russia and Romania respectively (Rotkirch et. al. 2012; Kovács 2014).

While much of the current work on marginalised people is more concerned with the specific and particular experience of post-socialist precarity that cuts across societies rather than having a narrow class-based focus, it is worth reiterating a point that indicates a possible avenue for linking research on workers and precarity in general in a fruitful manner. Workers in postsocialist states are at the sharp end of neo-capitalism and are thus an important bellwether. Even as they are the ones most enmeshed in new forms of capitalist relations debates continue about the relative degree of their incorporation in to the marketized, entrepreneurial sense of self associated with neoliberal governmentality, or even whether, given the rapid industrialisation of part of Eurasia in the socialist period, older, peasant identities remain informative of working-class identities (Peacock 2012). At the same time we should take a leaf from those who use the example of the global south to challenge not only the position that class is no longer relevant, but also question the ‘marginality paradigm’ along with precaritization more generally as a useful heuristic (Munck 2013). As post-socialist societies are incorporated ever more intensively by transnational corporations as they relocate low cost, yet labour intensive processes there, a re-proletarianization approach is just as possible as the deindustrialisation one. The logic of this may be compounded by the relative ethnic homogeneity that remains in working-class communities (Ost 2015). As the transnational factory and post-socialist workers encounter each other, what will be the results in terms of resistance and reaction, given the socialist inheritance? Will it be continued atomisation or articulation? Hopefully, this review article shows that post-socialist workers are, like E. P. Thompson’s English working class in the early nineteenth century, ‘present’ at their own making – i.e. subjectively responsive to continuity and change in their reinscription as workers (Krinsky 2007). Just as post-socialist

transformation cannot be seen to have an end point or be ‘done and dusted’, class relations in Eastern Europe and Eurasia is are ongoing processes. They are neither statically objective, neither are they completely open-ended; ‘but does not mean an end to agency or creativity, just that symbolic and cultural dynamics, as they unfold, do not do so randomly, but are constrained shaped—and recursively shape—the political and social worlds in which they occur.’ (Krinsky 2007: 344). Helemäe and Saar (2013: 54) argue that this makes postsocialist societies extraordinary laboratories for testing both existing theories and elaborating new ones on class (Eyal et al. 2003). They present the opportunity to challenge and develop knowledge (cf. Stenning and Hörschelmann 2008).

Lem’s critique (2002: 301) of the neglect of class by postindustrial theorists in the West is instructive to the post-socialist context and relevance of class: ‘the presence of new kinds of workers in new kinds of enterprises, in contexts that involve increasingly political and cultural complexity, with the emergence of nationalism and regionalism, does not necessarily imply the elimination of subjectivities that express such class divisions.’ While the mainstream marginalization of class discourse continues in these societies and influences perhaps most of all workers themselves, whose class consciousness and identity remain ‘underdeveloped’ (in favour of ethnic identity in numerous countries, particularly Estonia) (Helemäe and Saar 2012: 54), this ‘repression’ leads to unpredictable political effects such as neo-nationalist populism (Kalb 2011: 14). Populism in Eastern Europe as a ‘return of the repressed’ anticipates unresolved issues in the burial of class analysis in the West too, particularly since the 2008 global financial crisis. The ongoing trauma of working-class experience in postsocialist societies in this sense needs to be comparatively appreciated as just a more extreme, brutal, and rapid version of the processes of labour disembedding in the West (just as urbanisation and industrialisation were in the socialist period – hence the possible continuing salience of peasant identities). Kalb links the particularly



rapid and extreme forms of ‘primitive accumulation’ and new class formations associated with this in Eastern Europe with the rise of right-wing populism and a ‘displaced version of working-class politics’ (Žižek 2008: 267, in Kalb 2012: 14-15). The newly exploited, ethnicized former working-classes of EE are now thoroughly dispossessed and left to their ‘depleted informal and sometimes criminal shadow economies’ (Kalb 2011: 18, Morris 2014). They are too easily reimagined as the dangerous opponents of civil society and democratization, thus justifying their absence in serious sociological inquiry, despite the fact that it is workers – at the sharp end – who are best qualified to immanent critique new forms of marketized social relations. Kalb concludes, ‘Ironically, therefore, the post-socialist East allows us to tell the West about class again [...] [T]his alerts us to the possibility that other driving forces, more straightforwardly associated with the making, unmaking, and restricting of class, may be the more fundamental ground from which xenophobia as a politically driven process gets its support base in the West’ (2011: 18-19). Thus sociological sensitivity to the experience of class and class analysis in the East is instructive of the continued need and importance of ‘new working-class studies’ in general; this entails an analysis of ‘working class lives as complex and embodied practices played out in a wide variety of spaces, neither reified nor vilified, but explored and analysed’ (Stenning 2005: 993, in Dowling 2009: 837).

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